

V **COMPATIBLE PUBLIC USE**

The Department of Fish and Game manages Wildlife Areas to protect and enhance the riparian habitat for wildlife species and to provide the public with compatible recreational uses. The key consideration in regard to public use is compatibility with the primary function of the Wildlife Area, which is the protection and enhancement of wildlife habitat. The compatibility factor is critical because some public uses have the potential to degrade the habitat to the point that the wildlife species are harmed.

The Sacramento River Wildlife Area is a beautiful, natural area that is attractive for a range of public uses. These uses have generally been related to the wildlife and fish that inhabit the property and the adjoining Sacramento River. Historically, the most common uses have been hunting and fishing and these uses are projected to continue to be popular. Surveys of recreation demand in California also indicate that other uses related to wildlife and the natural environment, such as wildlife viewing and photography will grow at a rapid rate in the coming years (EDAW Inc., 2003). The responsibility of the Department through this Planning Process is to evaluate the demand for various public uses and evaluate the potential of such uses to impact the riparian habitat resource. In addition the Department will pursue the provision of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accommodations within its programs and facilities.

❖ **Evaluation of Public Use**

The Planning Process included the evaluation of the public demand for use of the Wildlife Area and the compatibility of such use with the protection and enhancement of wildlife habitat. This compatibility evaluation focused on three principal factors:

1. The potential for the uses to unreasonably impact the habitat and the fish and wildlife that inhabit the area.
2. The potential for the uses to unreasonably impact adjoining land uses.
3. The anticipated resources of the Department to manage the potential uses.

Information was obtained through analysis of the *Sacramento River Public Recreation Access Study – Red Bluff to Coulsa*. This Study was particularly valuable to the Planning Process because it was a very recent analysis that was structured to anticipate the information needs of the Planning Process. It involved an extensive public input component as well as substantial involvement by all of the agencies that manage public habitat along the river. The information gathering process for this Plan also involved interviews with representatives of various recreation interest groups and meetings with Department, DWR and USFWS staff members familiar with recreation use of public lands along the river.

The Wildlife Area is a low-lying, natural area that is subject to frequent flooding. Permanent buildings within the floodplain would be subject to frequent flood damage and are practically precluded by regulations promulgated through the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Reclamation Board. Other substantial, permanent recreation improvements would likewise be subject to frequent inundation

and damage. The majority of the Area is covered by dense riparian forest without substantial open areas. It was determined that many traditional outdoor recreation uses, such as sports which require facilities or play fields were not physically appropriate for the Wildlife Area and were not consistent with the mission of the Department.

The potential use of the Wildlife Area is additionally affected by the limited access to the Units. The current legal access for fourteen of the nineteen separate Units and Subunits is only from the river. The Wildlife Area is legally accessible from the land at five locations, however, the character of the riparian habitat is such that these access points only permit reasonable access to a portion of those Units. This limitation is due to the presence of water features (sloughs, side channels and oxbow lakes) and dense riparian forests that make pedestrian passage extremely difficult. This access limitation does function, however, to regulate the level of human activity and help to ensure that the habitat value of the Wildlife Area is not substantially diminished by public use.

Eight activities were determined to be compatible public recreation uses that should be supported in the management of the Wildlife Area as depicted in Figure 8. These uses were: hunting, fishing, hiking, beach activities, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education and interpretation. Table 4 indicates the compatibility of these nine public uses for each Unit and Subunit of the Wildlife Area. These site-specific compatibility determinations were primarily a function of the physical composition of each site. For example, a site that lacks gravel bars would not be compatible with beach activities. Figure 9 depicts public recreation uses occurring along the Sacramento River.

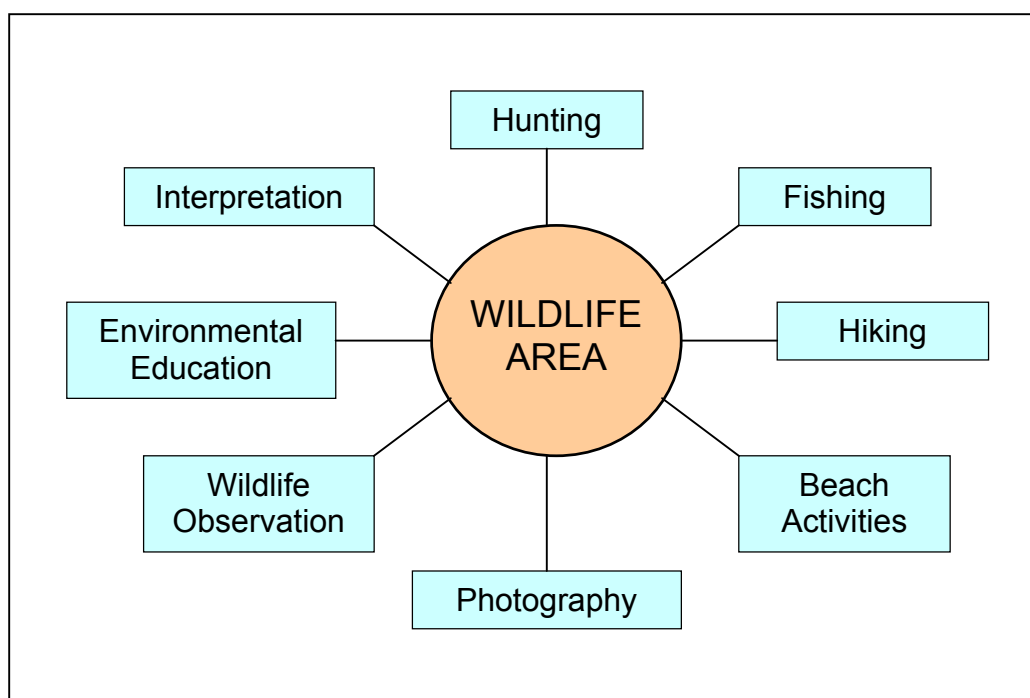


Figure 8. Compatible Public Uses

TABLE 7 - COMPATIBLE PUBLIC USE MATRIX

Unit / Subunit	River Access	Land Access	Compatible Uses							
			Hiking	Fishing	Hunting	Beach Activities	Wildlife Observation	Photography	Environmental Education	Interpretation
Merrill's Landing	Yes	Yes	C/C-r	C/C-r	C/C-r	C/C-r	C/C-r	C/C-r	C/C-r	C/C-r
Dicus Slough	Yes	No	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r
Wilson Landing	Yes	No	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r
Pine Creek - North	Yes	No	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r
- West	Yes	Yes	C/C-r	C/C-r	C/C-r	C/C-r	C/C-r	C/C-r	C/C-r	C/C-r
- East	Yes	Yes	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C
Shannon Slough	Yes	No	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r
Ord Bend	Yes	No	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r
Jacinto	Yes	No	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r
Oxbow	Yes	No	N	C-r	C-r	N	C-r	C-r	C-r	N
Beehive Bend	Yes	No	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r
Princeton - North	Yes	Yes	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C
- East	Yes	Yes	C	C	C	N	C	C	C	C
- South	Yes	No	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r
Stegeman	Yes	No	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r
Moulton - North	Yes	No	C-r	C-r	C-r	N	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r
- South	Yes	No	C-r	C-r	C-r	N	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r
Colusa - North	Yes	No	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r	C-r
- South	Yes	No	N	C-r	C-r	N	C-r	C-r	C-r	N

Abbreviation Key:	"River"	Means that legal, public access to the Unit or Subunit is only possible from the Sacramento River.
	"Land"	Means that legal, public access to the Unit or Subunit is possible from the Sacramento River and from the land at the location specified below. It is important to note that legal land access to a portion of the Unit of Subunit may not permit practical access to the entire area due to dense vegetation and water features.
	"C"	Means that the use is generally compatible with the characteristics of the respective site with legal access possible from the land at the location specified below or from the Sacramento River.
	"C-r"	Means that the use is generally compatible with the characteristics of the respective site with legal access possible only from the Sacramento River.
	"C/C-r"	Means that the use is generally compatible with the characteristics of the respective site with legal access to a small portion of the site possible at the location specified below and access to the majority of the site possible only from the Sacramento River.
	"N"	Means that the use is not compatible with the characteristics of the respective site.

Public Road Access Locations:	Princeton - East -	In Glenn County, along Road XX, south of the Princeton ferry site
	Princeton - North -	In Glenn County, E. side of Highway 49, 1.3 mi. N. of Princeton.
	Pine Creek - East -	In Butte County, from River Road, .45 miles north of Sacramento Avenue
	Pine Creek - West -	In Glenn County, at the east end of Road 23
	Merrill's Landing -	In Butte County, from Ballard Road, on the south side of the Butte-Tehama county line



Figure 9. Public Recreation Uses along the Sacramento River

Hunting – Hunting has historically been a popular seasonal use of the Wildlife Area. Principal game species include mule deer, various species of ducks and geese, mourning doves, ring-necked pheasants and California quail. The potential for a Spring turkey season has also been noted by the public and Department staff. The use or possession of rifles and pistols is not permitted because of the close proximity to other properties and of boats on the river. At the current time the hunting season runs from the opening of deer season through January 31. The Wildlife Area has limited opportunity for “walk in” hunting from the land and most access is gained from the river via boats. Access to the Wildlife Area for hunting is permitted from the river during low flow and high flow conditions when all or part of the land area may be flooded subject to established hunting regulations.

Fishing – Fishing on the Wildlife Area focuses on the adjoining Sacramento River although there are additional fishing opportunities in the oxbow lakes of the Beehive Bend, Wilson Landing and Merrill’s Landing Units. Seasonal fishing for the anadromous species, chinook salmon, steelhead rainbow trout, striped bass, sturgeon and American shad, attracts the most interest. Resident species including largemouth and smallmouth bass, bluegill, green sunfish, channel catfish and brown bullhead also provide considerable recreation. The Wildlife Area has limited opportunity for “walk in” fishing from the land and most activity is from boats on the river.

Hiking – While the water features and dense vegetation on many parts of the Wildlife Area limits hiking options, there are substantial opportunities available in the grassland areas, large gravel bars and where primitive pathways exist. The attractiveness of hiking is greatly enhanced by the opportunity for wildlife viewing and general appreciation of the beauty of the river and the riparian habitat.

Beach Activities – The gravel bar portions of the Wildlife Area, especially those composed of fine grain materials are attractive for a combination of related activities that include sunbathing, swimming and picnicking. These activities are often combined with fishing, hiking, photography and wildlife viewing. As with other uses, the lack of land accessibility acts to limit and regulate this activity and the potential impacts.

Photography – The Wildlife Area offers the opportunity for photography related to wildlife species and the general riparian environment. The riparian forest provides a substantial and diverse range of photography possibilities. As with other uses, the limited accessibility of the Wildlife Area affects the relative attractiveness of the photography opportunity.

Wildlife Observation – The opportunity for wildlife viewing is substantial. The rich environment of the riparian forest supports a very wide range of wildlife species. The potential for birding is especially great given the variety of species that frequent the area. Limited accessibility of the Wildlife Area makes it more difficult to access most Units, but the relative lack of human activity also results in an enhanced quality of wildlife viewing.

Environmental Education – Environmental education opportunities are substantial in the Wildlife Area. Class field trips ranging from local elementary schools to area universities can permit a “hands on” appreciation of the riparian ecosystem including wildlife, vegetation and geomorphic processes. Management support to this use will largely depend on future staffing and funding determinations. The limited access to the Wildlife Area will in turn limit the locations for this use.

Interpretation – The Wildlife Area has the potential to support a modest interpretive program on site. Interpretive kiosks at key public access locations could provide both regulatory and interpretive information. Staffed interpretive programs will be a function of future staffing and funding availability. The potential of a multi-agency visitor/interpretive center in the Pine Creek/Hamilton City has been raised (EDAW Inc., 2003). This concept would permit the Department to work cooperatively with other key agencies (DPR, USFWS, etc.) and the local community to combine their resources and expertise to offer a substantial interpretive program to the public.

Other Public Use – One additional use, boat camping, was evaluated and is recommended for detailed review by the Department as a potential amendment to the Wildlife Area regulations. Camping is not currently permitted in the Wildlife Area. For the riparian forest areas, this is a practical standard because the dense forest is not a particularly attractive location for camping. Additionally, traditional drive up camping could result in problems with vehicular degradation of habitat, fire hazard and littering. An opportunity does exist, however, for camping, with access limited to boats, on large gravel bars adjoining the river. The *Sacramento River Public Recreation Access Study – Red Bluff to Coulsa* documented the public interest in boat camping and the potential of establishing a “boating trail” along the river. Boat camping on gravel bars would not raise the same issues as camping in the riparian forest areas and it would combine well with other uses such as fishing and beach activities.

The potential for the use of small portions of the Wildlife Area for related recreation uses such as boat ramps, picnic areas and other small-scale recreation facilities was also reviewed. It was determined that these uses could be accommodated under the existing Wildlife Area regulation under the authority of either the Regional Manager or the Wildlife Conservation Board. These type of uses will likely require the establishment of a partnership with another agency for development and operation of such facilities and they can be considered on an individual basis.

Other public use options were evaluated as part of the Planning Process but were determined to be incompatible with the Wildlife Area for various reasons. Such potential public uses were variously determined to be:

- Potentially detrimental to the riparian habitat and the wildlife and fisheries resource (e.g. off road vehicle use).
- Not physically suitable to the frequently flooded, riparian environment (i.e. uses requiring buildings).
- Outside of the mission of the Department (e.g. improved park and sports facilities).

❖ Wildlife Area Regulations

The regulations that direct the public use of the Wildlife Area are contained in Title 14 (Natural Resources) of the California Code of Regulations. Division 1 of Title 14 contains regulations that have been formally adopted by the California Fish and Game Commission, reviewed and approved by the Office of Administrative Law, and filed with the Secretary of State. The current regulations applicable to the Wildlife Area include Regulations for General Public Use Activities (Section 550) which are applicable to all Wildlife Areas. They also include Hunting, Firearms, and Archery Equipment and Permit Requirements (Section 551) which contain hunting regulations that relate to all wildlife areas as well as use regulations that apply specifically to the Sacramento River Wildlife Area. In addition, standard hunting and fishing regulations apply to the Wildlife Area.

Although the regulations that govern public use of the Wildlife Area are expected to change over time, a summary of the current regulations is provided to inform the reader as to the current situation. The following summary of the regulations that apply to the Wildlife Area does not reflect all requirements in detail. The then-current and complete regulations should be consulted for any determination related to the use of the Wildlife Area.

General Public Use Activities (Section 550) – These general requirements set basic standards for protection of all wildlife areas and protection of public safety. The Regional Manager has authority to establish additional regulations for the Wildlife Area that are not otherwise provided for in Sections 550 and 551. The following Regulations for General Public Use Activities are currently applicable to all wildlife areas including the Sacramento River and Merrill’s Landing Wildlife Areas. Where regulations require a specific action by the Department to be applicable, the status of any such action is noted in *Italics*.

- ◆ The Department may specify entry locations, limit entry or close wildlife areas to protect resources or public safety. Specified public notice is required of such entry limitations or closure. *No entry locations, limitations or closures have been established.*
- ◆ Use permits are required for organized events or gatherings.
- ◆ Motor driven vehicles and trailers are not permitted except on public roads, parking areas or other trails designated by the Department. *No such trails have been designated.*
- ◆ Drivers must comply with all posted traffic signs.
- ◆ The Department may restrict the use and operations of boats. *No such restrictions have been established.*
- ◆ Certain activities are not permitted for the protection of the Wildlife Area and protection of public safety. These prohibited uses include:
 - Damage or removal of property owned by others.
 - Deposit of litter, rubbish, toxic substances or other materials.
 - Damage to plant materials.
 - Removal of soil, sand, gravel, rock etc.
 - Collection, disturbance or removal of bottles or other artifacts.
 - Camping, except in designated areas. *No such areas have been designated.*
 - Open fires from April 30 through October 30.
 - Livestock grazing, except with a permit. *No such permits have been granted.*
 - Taking fish or frogs for commercial purposes.
 - Possession of alcohol in the field, except for designated parking areas.
- ◆ Hunting and fishing is permitted subject to regular open seasons and regulations and the special provisions of Section 551.
- ◆ Dogs are allowed only for hunting or only when under immediate control. The Department may prohibit or restrict the use of dogs. *No such prohibition or restriction has been established.*
- ◆ The Department may eject a person from the Wildlife Area for specified reasons.
- ◆ Users are responsible for knowing area-specific regulations in Section 551.

Hunting, Firearms, and Archery Equipment and Permit Requirements (Section 551) – This section contains general regulations related to hunting and firearms that apply to wildlife areas in general. It also contains specific regulations that apply to the Sacramento River Wildlife Area. These specific regulations are in addition to the other requirements of Section 550 and 551. They are intended to respond to the unique characteristics of the Wildlife Area. No specific regulations have been established for the Merrill’s Landing Wildlife Area. The general regulations applicable to all wildlife areas include:

- ◆ Raptors may be used to take legal game in accordance with general hunting regulations.
- ◆ Except for designated shooting areas or with a special permit, possession and use of firearms and archery equipment is permitted only for hunting purposes. *No areas have been designated for shooting.*

The specific regulations that apply to the Sacramento River Wildlife Area include:

- ◆ No rifles or pistols may be used or possessed.
- ◆ Hunting is permitted daily from the opening of deer season through January 31 during open seasons for authorized species. All otherwise legal species are authorized.
- ◆ Camping and trailers are not permitted.

As previously noted, it is anticipated that the current regulations will change in the future as the Department continues to monitor the public use of the Wildlife Area and proposes appropriate responses to changed circumstances.

❖ **Coordination to Support Public Use**

Because the Wildlife Area is part of a mosaic of publicly managed habitat property, coordination with other agencies is a key to providing the best and most cost-effective public use opportunities in the Wildlife Area and along the river corridor in general. While the various agencies have different functional niches and procedures, a cooperative environment has been established. The Memorandum of Understanding between the Department, DPR and USFWS can serve as a basis for greater coordination and efficiencies in the future. The need for a permanent management coordination organization was established in the *Sacramento River Public Recreation Access Study – Red Bluff to Coulsa* and the formation of such an entity should be pursued by the Department in conjunction with other agencies.

Consistent Regulations – Regulatory consistency is an important objective for the Wildlife Area. This includes consistency between the public use regulations that currently apply to the Sacramento River and Merrill’s Landing Wildlife Areas. It also includes consistency with the regulations that govern the public use of other publicly managed habitat properties. This may involve transfer of some properties and consolidation of ownership or management and it should involve the greatest practical consistency between the regulations that the various agencies apply to public use. The development of the Comprehensive Conservation Plan for the Sacramento River National Wildlife Refuge, concurrent with this Planning Process, offers the opportunity to make the public use of the Wildlife Area and the National Wildlife Refuge as seamless as possible. Department staff and USFWS staff have initiated a joint review of regulations as part of the coordination between the two planning efforts.

Pine Creek/Hamilton City Multi-agency Master Plan – The *Sacramento River Public Recreation Access Study – Red Bluff to Coulsa* also identified the potential to develop a joint master plan for the Pine Creek/Hamilton City area. This area contains approximately 3800 acres of land that is publicly owned or is scheduled to be transferred to public agencies. A major flood damage reduction project is proposed with habitat restoration as a major component. The habitat management entities include the Department, DPR, DWR, USFWS, TNC and River Partners and all have initially expressed an interest in joining together to plan a complex of properties that can offer the combination of effective habitat preservation and extensive public recreation. Continued support for this effort is incorporated into this Plan.

Large-Scale Public River Events – Large scale tubing events on the river, below the Gianella Bridge on Highway 32, have become a tradition for college students and others. The largest concentration of people is typically on the Labor Day weekend when crowds have been estimated to be up to 20,000 persons. Smaller numbers of people have congregated in the area on the Memorial Day and July 4th holidays. This very large concentration of people results in significant problems that include parking violations, public intoxication, huge amounts of litter and habitat degradation. Because a popular takeout and recreation point for the event has been the gravel bar on the Pine Creek-South Subunit, commonly known as “Beer Can Beach”, the Department has been closely involved with the annual multi-agency law enforcement and management effort. The purpose of the coordination is to protect the habitat resources and to ensure reasonable safety for the many participants.

The natural recruitment of riparian vegetation on the subject gravel bar may act to discourage the use of the Pine Creek-South area over time. If this occurs, it is likely that the activity focus will move to another site in the Wildlife Area or to an adjoining public habitat property. It is imperative that the Department plan and manage for the long-term impact of these events on the habitat resource and continue to be a part of the combined law enforcement and management team.

❖ **Management Support of Public Use**

As the population of the four counties surrounding the Wildlife Area and California in general continues to increase, the demand for public recreation use of the Wildlife Area will continue to grow (EDAW Inc., 2003). This Plan anticipates the opportunities and issues that will arise and identifies the management actions that will be required to adequately support compatible public recreation use of the Wildlife Area. A complete program of Goals and follow-up Tasks is contained in Chapter VI.

Regulation Adjustments – As the circumstances surrounding the Wildlife Area change over time, adjustment of the regulations that govern public uses will be required. The revision of these regulations requires approval of the State Fish and Game Commission. Detailed evaluation of the following regulation changes is proposed following adoption of this Plan:

- Combine the Sacramento River and Merrill’s Landing Wildlife Areas with one set of regulations for the entire area.
- Permit boat camping on gravel bar areas not covered by riparian vegetation.
- Permit a spring turkey hunting season.

An biennial review of the regulations by management staff assigned to the Wildlife Area is appropriate for the future to ensure that regulations remain current.

Public Information – A common theme that was raised by the public during the public outreach for both the Planning Process and the *Sacramento River Public Recreation Access Study – Red Bluff to Coulsa* was that access information is needed to permit people to better utilize the Wildlife Area for compatible recreation uses. Information to improve public use opportunities on the Wildlife Area should be coordinated with other public land management agencies to include:

- Online information regarding access, locations and compatible public uses (a website was established in the fall of 2003 at www.sacramentoriver.org).
- A hardcopy brochure to identify public access lands and compatible public uses along the river.

- A coordinated signing program to physically identify the Wildlife Area and key regulations.

Access improvements – Improved and expanded access opportunities are also needed to support compatible public use. This need was commonly expressed as part of public input meetings and interviews that were included in the Planning Process. Consistent with the Purposes of this Plan, improvements should include:

- Additional land access points where a substantial public use potential exists.
- Primitive parking areas and pedestrian use of primitive access roads connecting to the river at key locations.
- Coordination of primitive access roads to connect to those on adjoining publicly owned property and as part of future restoration projects.

The primary purpose of the Wildlife Area is the conservation of riparian habitat for fish and wildlife species and very limited public improvements are proposed. The riparian habitat is composed of frequently flooded property with irregular contours and very dense vegetation, where access is practically limited and difficult for all persons. All Units, as well as habitat properties managed by other public agencies along the river, offer the same basic opportunity to experience the riparian environment and access the Sacramento River. In compliance with applicable State and federal law, the Department will evaluate the provision of access for persons with disabilities, within the Wildlife Area, including all public access programs and improved facilities. This Plan proposes that the Department will also work cooperatively with the managers of other similar public habitat property in the river corridor (ex. DPR and USFWS) to seek to ensure that appropriate accessibility to the experience of the riparian habitat is provided for all persons.

The Wildlife Area has been unbudgeted in the past. In order to fully support compatible public uses and concurrently protect the habitat and wildlife resources, designated staffing and an operations and maintenance budget will be required. Chapter VII proposes the resources needed to support the anticipated public use and other management needs of the Wildlife Area.

Cooperation with Neighbors – During the public outreach component of the Planning Process neighbors of the Wildlife Area and representatives of agricultural interests expressed concerns that public use of the Wildlife Area could result in negative impacts on adjoining private land. The potential for trespass, vandalism and other illicit activity was raised as an issue. In response to these concerns, Chapter VI includes a number of strategies to mitigate the type of concerns that were raised. These actions will include direct communication with neighbors, continued communication through the SRCAF, signing of the Wildlife Area, access controls and coordinated design of future restoration projects. The Department is also working as part of the SRCAF to develop a Good Neighbor Policy to address these concerns.